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C O N F I D E N T I A L THE HAGUE 002025

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TAGS: PGOV PREL NATO AF NL

SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/AFGHANISTAN: CABINET OPTS FOR TWO-YEAR  
ISAF EXTENSION

Classified By: Ambassador Roland Arnall, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶11. (C) Summary: The Dutch Cabinet announced November 30 the decision to extend its ISAF mission in Uruzgan province for an additional two years to August 2010, followed by a four month "re-deployment" phase so that Dutch Task Force Uruzgan is withdrawn from Uruzgan by December 2010. By this date, the Dutch expect NATO to find a new Ally to head the military aspects of the mission in Uruzgan. Parliament will hold two hearings on December 6-7, followed by a presentation by PM Balkenende on December 17, and a parliamentary vote most likely on December 18. GONL officials have conferred with parliament members, and are confident the extension question can be wrapped up prior to the parliamentary winter break on December 20. End summary.

Decision Letter to Extend

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¶12. (SBU) The Dutch Cabinet announced its decision to Parliament to extend its ISAF mission in Uruzgan via an "Article 100" letter, which was sent to Parliament following the Cabinet meeting on November 30. According to the executive summary of the Article 100 letter, the current "overall picture (in Uruzgan) is mixed," with some aspects proving disappointing, while other aspects having gone better than expected. The letter notes that both NATO and the Afghan government have requested the Dutch to extend, and that the Dutch had asked for "NATO solidarity," i.e., contributions from other NATO Allies to help the Dutch in Uruzgan. The Article 100 letter noted that these contributions were "more limited than we had hoped," but that the French, Slovak, Hungarian and Czech contributions are greatly appreciated. Contrary to earlier statements by Dutch officials, the letter also includes a note on the Georgian offer, but does not specify if the Dutch will accept it. Finally, the letter suggests that additional offers may be possible in the run-up to the new mission. (Note: In a November 28 meeting with a visiting U.S. Congressman, Deputy POLDIR Wim Geerts suggested that the Dutch hoped the Danes would provide some F-16s beginning next summer. End note.) As a result, the Dutch military presence in Uruzgan can be reduced after the current mission mandate ends in August 2008.

¶13. (SBU) The letter notes that the Dutch took several points into consideration, including NATO security, solidarity and credibility, the need to support the Afghan government, a

sense of solidarity with the Afghan people, and a concern for human rights and poverty reduction. According to the letter, these factors justify an ongoing Dutch military and diplomatic presence, and continued development cooperation efforts in Afghanistan and Uruzgan. Finally, the letter notes that a continued mission in Uruzgan serves Dutch national security interests.

¶4. (SBU) The letter makes clear that the Dutch will retain military responsibility for Uruzgan until August 1, 2010, and states "by then, the Netherlands will have borne the burden as a NATO partner." As of August 1, 2010, the Dutch will begin to re-deploy Task Force Uruzgan, to be completed by December 1, 2010. The Cabinet emphasized in the letter that NATO is responsible for a "timely filling of the existing requirements for ISAF, including Uruzgan," i.e., another Ally must step up and take the lead by this time.

¶5. (SBU) The Article 100 letter notes that the new mission will change in several ways. First, more resources will be invested in supporting and promoting reconstruction efforts by the Afghan government and NGOs. Support and guidance for the development of effective governance will also be intensified. Second, training and monitoring of Afghan security forces will be intensified, with the aim of ensuring effective control by the Afghan army and police of the main populated areas and connecting roads.

¶6. (SBU) To support the mission, the letter notes that the Dutch will contribute military forces in the form of the Uruzgan Task Force Uruzgan, consisting of the provincial reconstruction team (PRT), a battle group and logistical support, two Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams (OMLTs), five Apache helicopters and four F-16 fighters. That said,

the letter notes that the Dutch will increase the civilian presence in the PRT, including the possibility that the PRT may eventually come under civilian leadership. Finally, the Dutch will assume command of RC-South for nine months from August 2008. In all, including contributions for other countries, the Dutch anticipate deploying 1,350 to 1,450 troops to Afghanistan under the new mission.

¶7. (SBU) Finally, the Article 100 letter focuses on the role of the international community, and the London Compact's expiration at the end of 2010. The new Dutch mission's nature and duration is aimed to correspond as much as possible with the international calendar for Afghanistan, in addition to Afghan presidential and parliamentary elections in 2009 and 2010. While the Dutch anticipate that the international community will need to remain involved in Afghanistan for many years, they anticipate that NATO's post-2010 role will gradually develop towards a military support mission focusing on training, equipping, and advising the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Police (ANP) -- this should be a main subject of discussion at the NATO Bucharest summit in April 2008.

All We Can Handle

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¶8. (C) In a closed-session outbrief for the diplomatic community on November 30, MFA Security Affairs Chief Robert de Groot and MOD Senior Advisor for Afghanistan David van Weel walked through justifications for the decision to extend. De Groot noted that following the Cabinet decision, the GONL would send the Article 100 letter to parliament, and PM Balkenende, FM Verhagen, Defense Minister van Middelkoop, and Development Minister Koenders will give press conferences justifying the decision. The ministers will emphasize that the GONL decided to extend to help the people of Afghanistan, and to help ensure the security of the Netherlands.

¶9. (C) De Groot said parliament will hold two hearings: a closed session on December 6 with SACEUR and Dutch CHOD Gen. Berlijn, and a public hearing on December 7 including Afghan parliamentarians, residents of Uruzgan, NGOs, military labor unions, and former commander of RC South Gen. van Loon.

Parliament will submit questions to the GONL on the decision to extend by December 11; the GONL expects more than 300 questions. Finally, de Groot said PM Balkenende will present the extension case to Parliament on December 17, followed by one last debate in Parliament prior to a vote. De Groot said a majority of parliamentarians are in favor of wrapping up the extension decision prior to the winter break on December 120.

110. (C) Both de Groot and van Weel emphasized that the extension will be very difficult for the Dutch, but that the Cabinet has determined how financially the extension will be sustained. That said, de Groot suspected that the cost of the new mission will be a major point of contention with opposition members in Parliament. At the very least, de Groot emphasized, the new mission will be an incredible strain on the Dutch military -- "whatever happens, we will stop being the military lead in Uruzgan by August 2010 -- we will have had all we can handle."

111. (C) Van Weel noted that the MOD will be receiving financial help for the mission from a number of different sources, including 270 million euros per year from the MFA. De Groot joked that the MFA will need to start closing down embassies as a result. Van Weel also noted that 200 million euros per year is allocated for peacebuilding measures out of the national budget -- he expected the MOD to receive all of that for the new mission, and will likely still need to raid the national budget in "yet to be determined areas -- we will get creative."

COMMENT

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112. (C) One hurdle down, with only the parliamentary debate to go. While the opposition is making considerable noise to delay the hearings until after Christmas, most in parliament want to "get it over with already." Public support for an

extension remains low, and the parliamentary debate will be very contentious. But we believe with the Cabinet fully on board that we are finally getting close to an extended Dutch mission in Uruzgan. GONL officials are quick to note, "two more years, and that's it." But the Article 100 letter is sufficiently vague that any number of possibilities could arise in 2010, including perhaps a new Dutch mission elsewhere in Afghanistan -- much will depend on the discussion among Allies at the NATO Bucharest summit in April 2008.

Arnall